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b. Dignity

Though the Nyakyusa lay so much stress on geniality, and praise a man for being 'a good mixer', yet they greatly admire dignity (*ubusisya*). To be *nsisya* (dignified, impressive) is one of the attributes of chiefs and village headmen, sought, as we have seen, through medicines; but ordinary men may also aspire to it in their persons and homesteads. Indeed, *ubusisysa bwa nkaja*, the dignity of the homestead, is one of the legitimate channels of ambition to a Nyakyusa, and is something achieved largely through hard work.

Two styles of huts are traditional—one round, with the wall slanting outwards towards the top, and a conical roof; the other rectangular with perpendicular walls, a pitched roof, and curving gables (cf. Plates X and XI). For a homestead to be dignified the huts must be built of good bamboos, and the space between them packed with oval-shaped mud bricks, carefully worked in patterns. Special pains are taken with the ends of long huts (*jfibaga*) to get a good curve on the roof pole, and a pleasing design of bricks and criss-cross binding on the gable (cf. Plate XI). Inside, the walls are plastered smooth, and house-proud women mould a pattern in the mud with their fingers, which runs round the wall like a frieze. A long hut, showing that the owner has many cattle and young wives to house, adds dignity, but the homestead of a relatively poor man may be *nsisya* if the huts are well built, the open space between them weeded and swept, and the bananas pruned and heavy with fruit; while a shabby long hut and a dirty court are never dignified, no matter how rich the owner. The insistence on cleanliness both within the huts and in the court is very marked;[1] men themselves weed and sweep regularly around their homesteads, and their young sons must help them. The Nyakyusa jibe at their neighbours for being dirty in person, in cooking, and in their homesteads: indeed the dirty habits of the women is given as a main reason for not intermarrying with the Kinga or Poroto; and a Christian confided in

[1] Thomson, Kerr-Cross, and Lugard were all greatly impressed by Nyakyusa cleanliness; Thomson, op. cit., p. 271; Kerr-Cross, 'Geographical Notes on the Country between Lakes Nyasa, Rukwa, and Tanganyika', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. VI (1890), p. 283; Lugard, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 131.

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us that it was a great effort to her to accept food from the Poroto when she went on preaching tours, because their huts and pots were so dirty.

Trees are felt to add to the dignity of a homestead as well as throwing a grateful shade; the beautiful *umwali* trees have long been valued for this purpose, and to-day exotics are much sought after. For example, the old chief Mwaipopo, noticing a fine cypress when he visited us at Isumba (a cottage that had once been a German mission hospital) inquired whether there were not some seedlings under the tree. He himself carefully dug up one and took it away to plant in his 'capital'. Some Nyakyusa even *steal* trees to adorn their homesteads. It is said that jacarandas planted out in an avenue at Tukuyu disappeared within a very short time.

The attributes of dignity in the homestead are changing perceptibly. Well-built huts in the old style, a long *ikibaga*, a well-swept court, fruitful bananas, and fine *umwali* trees are mentioned by the old men; but many of the younger ones prefer hip-roofed houses (a style introduced by Europeans and known, appropriately enough, as 'the partridge') with windows and door of European pattern, beds of flowers, roses, fine coffee and exotic trees. Yet they keep the court well swept; for lawns have not become fashionable.

A fine presence, a well-kept homestead rich in cattle and bananas and shaded with stately trees, are in themselves impressive, but the possessor of them only reaches his full dignity when he acts as host, and uses his fine food and fine home for lavish hospitality. Wealth and an impressive manner, without urbanity and hospitality, may well lead to accusations of witchcraft.

c. Display

Feasts provide opportunity for swaggering parades and dances in which the Nyakyusa delight to display themselves and their possessions; they are the great occasions for *ukumoga*, that is, display in approved forms. Dancing, exhibiting a beautiful body with only a narrow bark-cloth belt to hide it, showing off physical strength and the aggressiveness of a warrior, parading orna-

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ments and fine clothes, or a splendid herd of cattle—all these are forms of *ukumoga*.

Traditionally Nyakyusa women wore only a bark-cloth belt tied around the waist and drawn between the legs to fall in streamers in front (cf. Plate XIII), and the pagan women cling to this dress, maintaining that it is only 'Swahili women with dirty diseases' who have to wear clothes to cover their sores, and if a pagan woman has a cloth she will probably wave it like a flag or hang it over one shoulder, when she dances. Except for the Christians, few Nyakyusa women regularly wear clothes. The Christians like a brightly coloured cloth tied under the armpits, and hanging to the knees (cf. Plate IX). Women make their own bark-cloths with great care, and decorate them with geometrical patterns in red and black, the red dye being imported from the Livingstone mountains; they mix this same dye with a fatty ointment made from the seeds of the *unsyunguti* tree, and rub it all over themselves. The most prized ornament (worn by both sexes) are body rings of coiled brass or copper wire (cf. Plate XIII). In the past men went naked except for these body rings[1] but, unlike the women, they have taken enthusiastically to clothes, and swagger around in brilliant loin-cloths or flowing white togas; or, if rather more sophisticated, in freshly pressed shorts and shirts, or lounge suits and topees.

The series of ceremonies at a girl's initiation and marriage, and at a funeral, are regular occasions for dancing, and the birth and death rates are so high that these occur very frequently within a chiefdom of 3,000 men. Once in a generation the eagerly anticipated 'coming out' ceremony offers an even greater opportunity for display. Skill in dancing is admired and the young people are encouraged to practise. A bride's mother does a great deal of the heavy work for her daughter, saying '*amoge tasi*', which means literally 'let her display herself first', and implies 'let her have a good time while she can'; and a father may use the same phrase of his son. Angombwike explained: 'The old men used to take great pride in their sons; often a man would say to his son: "Don't you hoe for me, I'll do the hoeing myself, you go and swagger about." Sometimes a man would sell a cow and buy a huge-bladed spear and give it to his son. Then, if he heard that his son

[1] cf. Elton, op. cit., p. 322; H. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa*, p. 18.

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was a fierce man in war, and always quarrelling with and spearing his fellows, he would say with pride: "He is my son!" And if he heard people saying: "The son of so and so is a fierce man", he would rejoice. And if the son wished to marry young his father would refuse him cows, saying: "Swagger first." That truculence (*ubukali*) is a form of swaggering for men, is still evident in the funeral dance, when men charge up and down with spears, displaying their strength, and take umbrage at the slightest thing (*vide infra*, p. 151). And marriage was deliberately delayed partly because a bachelor was thought to be a fiercer warrior than a married man.

This admiration of truculence, as shown in the funeral dance, reveals a contradiction in Nyakyusa values. On the one hand urbanity and good temper are praised—they are intrinsic to *ukwangala*—on the other truculence. Is the opposition one between old and new values, or is the contradiction itself traditional? It is obvious that a readiness to fight was a quality valuable to the village in the days of inter-village warfare, and the Nyakyusa tell of murderers and even thieves being reprieved just because they were so useful in war. 'We did not drive away violent men (*abagasi*) in the old days; we said: "They will fight along with us in the future" '; whereas since the pacification of the country, quarrelsome men have become nothing but a liability, likely to get their fellows and their chief into trouble with the Administration. The Christian emphasis, also, is all on the virtue of peaceableness. There has probably been some change in values with the disappearance of war from the villages, but we think that a certain contradiction always existed: swaggering young men were admired, and children were warned not to be quarrelsome (*nkali*) towards their fellows, lest they be accused of practising witchcraft, or rouse the anger of a witch. The contradiction is not, of course, peculiar to Nyakyusa society, and it may be resolved by defining the groups within which fighting is excluded, and those in which it is approved. Most Nyakyusa would hold that in the old days quarrelsomeness within the village was bad, that towards members of another village of the same chiefdom it was allowable, and towards members of another chiefdom it was good. In the wider society of to-day the same distinctions are apparent: the war dance at funerals is limited lest it lead to fighting between villages (*vide infra*, p. 151) but admir-

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ing audiences watch their friends in the detachment of the King's African Rifles at bayonet drill in Masoko.[1]

Display is felt to be particularly appropriate to young people, and bachelors were held to be the fiercest warriors, but neither dancing nor fighting was confined to young men. The chief Mwaipopo (Plate V) was famous as a skilful and ardent dancer when over seventy, and the leader in war was the senior headman of the country, who, if not already married when he took office, had to marry almost immediately, since his wife shared in the ritual of establishing his house. Furthermore the villages of married men of the ruling generation fought, as well as the villages of their bachelor brothers and sons.

That the Nyakyusa had some skill in warfare is certain, for they defeated and drove off Ngoni raiders and warriors of the Sangu chief Merere,[2] but they never developed a military kingdom like that of the Bemba to the west, or the Hehe to the east, nor did they raid at large like the Masai and Ngoni. Their geographical position sheltered them very considerably from outside attack, and discouraged raiding abroad. They confined themselves mostly to lifting the cattle of neighbouring chiefdoms.

Cattle, whether they be spoils of war or inherited wealth, are displayed. Not only does a long byre add to the dignity of a homestead, but, when there is some ceremony at the home of a rich man, he shows off his herd by driving it round and round the homestead. At other times his sons gallop it along the village street, the iron bells with which the animals are adorned ringing merrily. Nyakyusa smiths make cow-bells in sets,[3] to chime in harmony, and the aim of a rich man is to own a set of bells which ring a full chime, and a herd large enough to carry them. Nowadays those who own bicycles display them in the same sort of way, riding round and round the homestead at a ceremony, and ringing the bells madly.

Unlike the enjoyment of good company (*ukwangala*), display

[1] This detachment was not supposed to include Nyakyusa who were recruited for a detachment stationed outside the district, but in fact Nyakyusa got in by posing as men from Ngonde, Nyasaland.

[2] D. Kerr-Cross, 'Crater-lakes north of Lake Nyasa', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. V (1895), p. 119–20; Lugard, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 56, speaks of the Nyakyusa as 'brave in war'.

[3] We deposited a set in the Livingstone Memorial Museum, Livingstone, N. Rhodesia.

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(*ukumoga*) is not confined to the company of contemporaries of the same sex. Indeed the liveliest dancing is before members of the opposite sex, and is often the preliminary to love-making; but full opportunity for display is thought to depend upon living in a village, rather than in scattered homesteads. Some Nyakyusa are colonists, cultivating and building out in unoccupied bush country five or six miles from a settled area; but living out in the bush is disliked by most people and is done, we were told, only for gain. Cattle are said to increase very much more quickly out in bush, where grazing is plentiful, than they do on the village pastures, and the yield of virgin fields made in the bush is high. Hence the Nyakyusa dictum: 'People live in the villages for display, in the bush for gain.' And individuals commonly display themselves as members of a group—a group of contemporaries of the same sex, that is, of village-mates.

d. Decency

The basis of Nyakyusa sexual morality is the separation of the sexual activities of successive generations, more particularly the separation of the sexual activities of mothers and sons, and the complete segregation of fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

Nyakyusa informants hold that boys are sent out of their parents' village to build apart so that their parents may have privacy. Mwaisumo explained: 'If a boy over ten years old stays at home to sleep, he is laughed at by his friends, and his own parents send him away. They say, "If he sleeps at home he will hear what his parents talk about at night"; the night is always full of lewd talk; and he may even see them undressing. He will grow up a fool, with little wisdom! You see at the boys' village', he went on to say, 'the older boys tell all sorts of stories, especially about women, they discuss love-making and women, and tell tales of their own conquests. The younger ones listen to these things and that's all right in the boys' village, that is how we learn, but we compare in our minds and think that if a boy stays at home it is as if he listened to all this from his parents, and people always do talk lewdly at night; and that is very bad, that is foolishness. But in the boys' village it is good for the young ones to listen, that is how children grow up.'